

Amendments to the Claims

Please replace all prior versions of the claims with the following claim set:

1. (amended) A ~~loose, particulate~~ material comprising a mass of loose, essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain coated with an elastomeric coating material, wherein the coating material comprises a thermoplastic polymer having a melt index of 20-40 g/10 min and Shore A hardness of 40-90.
2. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the coating comprises 2-8% by weight of the silica sand.
3. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the coating comprises 4-6% by weight of the silica sand.
4. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the silica sand grains are of an overall diameter in the range of 0.1 mm to 2 mm.
5. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the melt index is 25-35 g/10 min.
6. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the Shore A hardness is 50-80.
7. (previously presented) A material according to claim 1, further comprising a coupling agent provided between the silica sand grains and the elastomeric coating material, so as to improve the binding between the grain and the coating material.
8. (original) A material according to claim 7, wherein said coupling agent is selected from the group consisting of

bifunctional silane comprising a reactive amino group and a hydrolyzable inorganic triethoxysilyl group,

terpolymer comprising glycidyl methacrylate (GMA) groups, and

terpolymer comprising maleic anhydride (MAH) groups.

9. (withdrawn) A method of producing a loose, particulate, coated bulk material, comprising the steps of

mixing a thermoplastic polymer with silica sand heated to a temperature between about 200-300°C,

adding a predetermined amount of water to the mixture so formed with continued mixing, and

directing air through the mixture so as to lower its temperature.

10-18. (cancelled)

19. (previously presented) A sports surface comprising a loose, particulate material according to claim 1.

20. (original) A sports surface according to claim 19, further comprising a pile fabric which is at least partly submerged in a layer of said loose particulate material.

21-22. (cancelled)

23. (previously presented) A loose, particulate material of claim 1, comprising a mass of essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain having an average diameter of about 0.1 mm to 2 mm coated with about 2-8%, based on the weight of the sand, of an elastomeric coating comprising a thermoplastic polymer having a melt index of 20-40 g/10 min and Shore A hardness of 40-90.

24. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 23, wherein the coating comprises about 4-6% by weight of the silica sand, wherein the melt index of the thermoplastic polymer is about 25-35 g/10 min, and wherein the Shore A hardness of the thermoplastic polymer is about 50-80.

25. (new) The loose, particulate material of claim 24, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is bonded to the silica sand grains by means of a coupling agent mixed with at least one of a phenolic, furan or melamine resin.

26. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 24, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is at least one of an ethylene alpha-olefin copolymer and an ethylene-butyl acrylate-maleic anhydride terpolymer.

27. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 23, wherein the loose particulate material is composed of two different fractions, a first fraction comprising a mass of essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain coated with the thermoplastic polymer, and a second fraction comprising agglomerates of such individual particles, the agglomerates having an average diameter of about 10-20 times the diameter of the sand grains.

28. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 27, wherein the first fraction comprises about 90 wt.% of the loose particulate material.

29. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 2, wherein the coating comprises about 4-6% by weight of the silica sand, wherein the melt index of the thermoplastic polymer is about 25-35 g/10 min, and wherein the Shore A hardness of the thermoplastic polymer is about 50-80.

30. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 29, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is bonded to the silica sand grains by means of a coupling agent mixed with at least one of a phenolic, furan or melamine resin.

31. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 29, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is at least one of an ethylene alpha-olefin copolymer and an ethylene-butyl acrylate-maleic anhydride terpolymer.

32. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 2, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is bonded to the silica sand grains by means of a coupling agent mixed with at least one of a phenolic, furan or melamine resin.

33. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 2, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is at least one of an ethylene alpha-olefin copolymer and an ethylene-butyl acrylate-maleic anhydride terpolymer.

34. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 2, wherein the loose particulate material is composed of two different fractions, a first fraction comprising a mass of essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain coated with the thermoplastic polymer, and a second fraction comprising agglomerates of such individual particles, the agglomerates having an average diameter of about 10-20 times the diameter of the sand grains.

35. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 34, wherein the first fraction comprises about 90 wt.% of the loose particulate material.

36. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 1, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is bonded to the silica sand grains by means of a coupling agent mixed with at least one of a phenolic, furan or melamine resin.

37. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 1, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is at least one of an ethylene alpha-olefin copolymer and an ethylene-butyl acrylate-maleic anhydride terpolymer.

38. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 1, wherein the loose particulate material includes two different fractions, a first fraction comprising a mass of essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain coated with the thermoplastic polymer, and a second fraction comprising agglomerates of such individual particles, the agglomerates having an average diameter of about 10-20 times the diameter of the sand grains.

39. (previously presented) The loose, particulate material of claim 38, wherein the first fraction comprises about 90 wt.% of the loose particulate material.

40. (previously presented) A mass of agglomerates, each agglomerate being formed by amalgamating individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain coated with about 2-8%, based on the weight of the sand, of an elastomeric coating comprising a thermoplastic polymer having a melt index of 20-40 g/10 min and Shore A hardness of 40-90, the agglomerates having an average diameter of about 10-20 times the diameter of the sand grains.

41. (previously presented) A mass of loose flocks, the flocks having an average diameter of about 10-40 mm, the flocks being formed by amalgamating the mass of agglomerates of claim 40 under moderate pressure.

42. (previously presented) A sports surface comprising a mass of the agglomerates of claim 41 deposited on a substrate.

43. (previously presented) A sports surface comprising a mass of the agglomerates of claim 40 deposited on a substrate.

44. (new) A material comprising a mass of loose, essentially individual particles, each particle comprising a silica sand grain having a melt-solidified coating of a thermoplastic polymer having a melt index of 20-40 g/10 min and Shore A hardness of 40-90.

45. (new) The loose, particulate material of claim 44, wherein the thermoplastic polymer is at least one of an ethylene alpha-olefin copolymer and an ethylene-butyl acrylate-maleic anhydride terpolymer.